

# HARVARD UNIVERSITY

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24 September 1969

Mr. Charles Bolte  
Carnegie Endowment for  
International Peace  
United Nations Plaza  
at 46th Street  
New York, New York

Dear Charles:

I am writing to urge that the Carnegie Endowment give serious consideration to the possibility of a reconvened "Bermuda Conference" on the Vietnam War this autumn.

It seems to me in retrospect that our discussions of December 1967 did a good deal not only to clarify the thinking and the doubts of the participants; it also added force and respectability to a moderate and reasoned critique of the war and thereby helped ease the way toward the bombing cessation and Paris talks of 1968.

Until recent weeks I had shared the view that the new Administration should be given time to devise a means of ending the war, i.e. should not be pressed prematurely to achieve miracles. I now conclude that sufficient time has passed to make a judgment on the Administration's efforts and that those efforts do not promise any speedy resolution of the conflict. Indeed, I am struck by the resurgence of old familiar forces in Washington and Saigon -- a conviction on the part of our military that the war is still winnable, a renewed optimism among some of our civilians about the efficacy of "pacification," and increasingly effective resistance by the Thieu government to pressures for meaningful conciliatory moves either internally or externally. Meanwhile, casualty rates are appalling, Paris remains stalemated, and -- in my judgment -- our college students are in no mood whatsoever to be mollified by token troop withdrawals and manipulation of draft calls.

The present conventional wisdom, which I share in lieu of more comforting evidence, is that the President does indeed "want out" but doesn't know how to do it; and that in the process he is in danger of being entrapped by the same forces that destroyed his predecessor. Alternatively, Nixon may have an elaborate "game plan" (as Stewart Alsop suggests in a recent Newsweek column); but many who know both Vietnam and America are convinced that such a plan is illusory and unworkable. At the least, our present course should be subject to careful study by competent outsiders lest it lead to further tragedy.

Mr. Charles Bolte  
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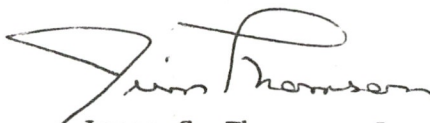
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In this context, I see a creative role for such "Establishment" institutions as the Endowment: to focus anew the doubts and ingenuity of respected leaders and specialists -- as we did at Bermuda -- on an effort to persuade our Government to do the hard things that it must if Vietnam is not to take an even greater toll on our society. My point is simply that the President needs help against destructive forces in America and Vietnam ( and perhaps in himself), and that we ought to try to give it to him. I would not presume to suggest an agenda, although I do feel that such elusive terms as "honorable peace" or "honorable withdrawal" are in need of scrutiny, definition, and perhaps even rejection. (A central question is whether we can get peace and keep the Thieu government; my own answer would be no.) I leave it to others to develop an agenda and a list of participants (though I would point out that such key figures as Harriman, Vance, and both Bundys have now become private citizens and might be included).

I have shown this letter to some of our previous Bermuda invitees, including Ed Reischauer, George Kistiakowsky, and Adam Yarmolinsky, and find them in general agreement with my proposal.

With my best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jim Thomson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James C. Thomson, Jr.  
Research Fellow

JCT/rr